

PRIDE 2003 BY KIM REED THE PRIDE SERVICE  
FIRST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SOCIETY OF SYRACUSE JUNE 22, 2003

It has been a year of historical milestones for this community. On December 17, 2002, the New York State Legislature passed the Sexual Orientation Non-Discrimination Act. It was first introduced in 1971, when I was 9 years old. In the aftermath of 31 years of struggle, we finally added the words sexual orientation to the state civil rights laws. On January 30, 2003, Belgium became the second country, joining the Netherlands, to give marriage rights to same-sex couples. This month, on June 17, the Canadian Cabinet decided not to contest a lower court ruling in Ontario, overturning laws that limited marriage to heterosexual couples. The judge ordered the issuance of marriage licenses to same sex couples. Two men who had loved one another for 22 years legally married. They tenderly kissed in the first moments of their marriage. The first gay male couple to legally marry in North America love one another, just the way we in this church today have dared to love outside the legal protections heterosexuals take for granted. Following Vermont's legalization of civil unions, California and Montana have bills pending before their state legislatures to give same sex couples rights equal to marriage. Lawrence and Garner v. The State of Texas is before the Supreme Court of the United States now. It is time to overturn Bowers and all the misguided, hateful laws that attempt to limit our love, our relationships, and our private lives. God, if God exists, would not deny our love.

We might have all been damaged by anger at some time, our own, other people's directed toward ourselves or others. A woman in the congregation who has struggled to come out, wrote to me, "I think FUUSS, at its best, shows what we can do when we stop hiding and put our energies into being fully human. The more I share myself, as myself, the more convinced I am, and less worried that others will reject me. When we're not worried about rejection, we all accomplish so much. All these twisted people and their violence - they seem to be angrily fighting rejection - of themselves by themselves and of themselves by others." Such anger is exhausting and limits everyone. Being sorry for moments of anger, working through by working with, is on everyone's eternal Christmas List. Compassion is the only way to love, yet such understanding takes courage to risk being vulnerable and to accept our need for one another.

If hell exists, it exists in broken, abusive or bad relationships. As gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans-gendered people, the desire to protect the magical, beautiful, life affirming wonder of our sexual and sacred feelings can sometimes lead us away from other people in an attempt to avoid conflict, judgment, the semantic violence of hearing dyke or fag or queer denigrated by people we cannot control. Overcoming self-hatred in the face of vulnerability is overcoming a real source of evil. As Unitarian Universalists we covenant to affirm the dignity and worth of every person. Together, we affirm our need for one another, our need for community, and our obligation to service. Some people want a better relationship, and this brings us together in a spirit of acceptance and forgiveness that can sustain spiritual understanding. That delicate web of interdependency is in all of us.

An honors student at Oswego named Angel, a young lesbian who is planning to wed her partner, tried to articulate the common desire for all people, across generations, to understand, to participate, to love without fear of being rejected or misunderstood. As I read her thesis report, I felt myself aging. On a trip down memory lane, I miscast and harshly criticized myself. But I thought about our common ground across generations, class situations, and levels of education. I wished that we could all let go of the pain of our differences and know that no one is lost, and that we can all minister to one another by simply listening. Don't turn away. What would it be like if we all turned away and were turned away and had nothing to share?

I am grateful to those who did not turn away. In the Welcoming Congregation over the last year, we have shared ideas, laughter and sadness, sang songs, and created a service. We are proud of our own individual selves as well as working in community to achieve larger goals. Pride festivals and marches are an important tradition in the face of our continued struggle for equality and freedom.

I want to give thanks to all for their courage, commitment and creativity, and the promise of the future. Thanks to Jerry Clausen for being an active ally in helping with this service and thanks to all our allies. Thanks to Radell Roberts, Grant Thatcher and Steven Wright for their strength and leadership. Thanks to Beverly Burlett for knowing how to cast a spell. Thanks to Chris Secor for his support and friendship. Thanks to Mike for ideas and interest. Thanks to Valerie McNickol for her powerful songs and honesty. Thanks to Jan Pope for being at the Pride table for the community, allowing us the freedom to march. Thanks to Peggy Flanders for blue-purple flowers in bloom in a garden so real arranged in greens and silver and purple. Thanks to Keith Bertrand's artistic designs, tenderness, endless help, hugs; that's a man. Thanks to David Blanchard for his outstanding ministry to us all. The simple pleasure of belonging in your company is worth the struggle.